

~~Mr. Kent~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

1 August 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Iraq: A Gloomy Prospect

SUMMARY

The five years since the overthrow of the monarchy have witnessed a drastic slowdown of economic progress in Iraq. More importantly, there has been a growth of a spirit of violence and extremism, expressing itself in street killings and summary executions. Finally, Baghdad is facing the longest and biggest tribal revolt since World War I. The Baathist regime is unpopular and will probably become more so as the Kurdish stalemate continues and casualties mount. Sooner or later the present regime will probably be displaced by a military group whose leaders would be likely to employ the same harsh tactics as the Baathists have done. It may be that a successor government, with capable and confident leadership, could turn Iraq's efforts and resources into constructive channels. The danger is that a cycle of violence is being started and that a series of military coups will produce a shifting, unstable, and increasingly violent political atmosphere in Iraq for years to come. Such conditions would seriously set back the once promising economic development of Iraq, provide tempting opportunities for the Soviets, for other Arabs, for Iran, and for Turkey to meddle in various ways, and generally set back chances for the stability which is a cardinal aim of US policy toward Iraq.

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1. Five years ago a military coup d'etat overthrew the Hashimite monarchy amid nationwide rejoicing that full independence from foreign influence had at last been obtained. Western influence declined sharply and the Soviets moved rapidly to establish a commanding presence through sizeable military and economic aid. The leaders of the coup soon fell out over questions of personal leadership and the degree of closeness the new Iraq should have with Nasser. After several plots in the first several months and one abortive rebellion, Abdul Karim Qasim confirmed his position as "the Sole, the Faithful Leader," who would, by his unique talent, create a modern state in Iraq.

2. Qasim governed Iraq by adroitly balancing political forces off against one another, now favoring the nationalists, now the Communists. He personally dominated the administration and arrogated to himself the decision-making power in virtually all important matters. Most of his army colleagues, happy with the prominent role they played in the government and with the new equipment and perquisites they received, found it in their interest to support him. The "Sole Leader" made a strong and rather successful play for support from the masses, especially the two to three hundred thousand peasants who flocked from the country during the fifties to seek work

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in Baghdad, living in vast settlements of mud and reed huts on the fringes of the city. However, he progressively alienated the bulk of politically conscious elements in the country by his inept and heavyhanded administration.

3. Despite Qasim's erratic leadership, the country managed to stagger along economically. A quarter of a billion dollars a year in oil revenues enabled the regime to carry out some development schemes and to import enough grain to make up for the errors of the land reform program. Show projects such as street paving, lighting and housing, particularly in the Baghdad area, were put in hand; some major efforts started under the old regime were finished; a number of industrial and communications projects were begun under Bloc supervision. Generally, however, business stagnated due to lack of confidence in the regime and overall progress in development was not very great. Finally, careless fiscal management and lavish spending on prestige items wasted a great deal of money and left the government with budget deficits and, toward the end, actual shortages of cash.

4. The most serious damages to Iraq from the Qasim regime are not the foreign debts and domestic business stagnation, which, in the light of continued oil revenues, can be dealt with in a few

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years by employing sound fiscal and economic policies, envisaged in the Baath program. The truly harmful result is the growth of a spirit of violence and extremism which has occurred in the last five years. During the high point of Communist influence in 1959, the "street" took to executing justice in its own fashion by brutal murders and dragging of bodies through the streets. Further, the regime itself turned to the practice of executing some of its convicted enemies -- four from the old regime, thirteen from the unsuccessful Mosul revolt of 1959.\* Probably most disastrous of all, Qasim's tactics of trying to control the Kurds by letting loyal tribes fight rebellious ones resulted in a major revolt which has seen large portions of Kurdistan out of government control for two years now.

5. Regrettably, the trend toward extremism has continued under the Baathist government. Believing itself capable of subduing the Kurds, the new regime refused to negotiate seriously the promised special status for the Kurdish areas and is conducting a harsh, repressive campaign, including summary execution of persons suspected

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Customarily in the Arab Near East, the unsuccessful plotter or the leader deposed by a coup has been jailed or exiled, not shot or hanged. There have been exceptions, of course, but generally the policy of leniency has been reciprocal and has been, so to speak, a "rule of the game."

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of aiding the Kurds, which it hopes will bring the rebels to submission. The bitterness, deriving from indiscriminate bombing of villages and similar measures, will bedevil attempts at Kurdish-Arab cooperation for a long time to come. The regime has tried and executed over 60 people already for terrorist actions committed in Mosul and Kirkuk in 1959 and 1960 and, apparently, shot out of hand a goodly number of the participants in the unsuccessful July 1963 Communist uprising at Rashid Camp in Baghdad. In a less violent vein, it is alienating most of the politically conscious elements of the population, choosing to run Iraq as an all-Baath state rather than seeking the broader cooperation which it badly needs to get Iraq on its feet, administratively and economically.

6. These developments present Iraq with two separate but related problems. In the first place, the determination of the Baath Party leaders to totally dominate the government is likely to backfire. The Baath does not have broad popular support, and dislike of its attempts to monopolize all important government posts is growing. Continued casualties and lack of progress in Kurdish operations are likely to cause increased dissension among army and civilians. In time, forces opposed to the Baath are almost certain to move against it. Although opposition to the Baath is at present

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disorganized and leaderless, sooner or later the present regime is likely to be displaced by a military group. Unless an outstanding leader is thrown up by such a coup, the chances are that it will be only one of a continuing series of transitory governments, bringing Iraq along the same path that Syria has trod since 1948.

7. Since no such group is presently discernible on the horizon, it is impossible to do more than speculate about the nature of its leadership. From the military, a leader of stature and ability might emerge; on the other hand, the opposition might have nothing better than the "strong man" so common in recent Syrian politics. Unless an outstanding leader emerges, the chances are for a continuing series of transitory governments, each under recurrent pressure from other ambitious military men.

8. The Baathist regime is also sowing the seeds of future trouble by encouraging the growth of violence and extremism and by the indiscriminate imposing of the death penalty. A successor regime will be strongly tempted to indulge in the same practices out of a spirit of vengeance, perpetuating the cycle -- the group in power rules harshly to forestall opposition, for it knows the opposition, once in power, will show little mercy. And so on and on as the employment of harsh tactics by the government results in

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increased use of violence and terrorism by those seeking to oust it. Further, personal feuds and private vengeance will have new opportunities to flourish in such an atmosphere. (In the last year or so of Qasim's rule, upwards of 50 murders in Mosul were attributed by the authorities to reprisal or counter-reprisal for the Communist excesses of 1959.)

9. Iraq has never been a model of peace and stability; it has had its share of coups d'etat, assassinations, tribal revolts, and street rioting. However, the scope of these activities has increased greatly in the past few years. The present Kurdish revolt exceeds in duration, numbers of insurgents, and area affected anything since the turbulent days immediately after World War I. Again, executions for political crimes far exceed the total of pre-Qasim days,\* and are increasingly being carried out summarily, without the delays which permit traditional leniency to be shown. In sum, the none-too-sturdy structure of legal process and orderly government, in the broad sense, put together by the British, which managed

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\* An Iraqi nationalist, who was strongly anti-Nuri, recently summed it up this way: "We used to talk about and publish things that irritated Nuri and the palace, knowing that we might go too far and lose our jobs, have our paper closed, or the like. But we knew Nuri wouldn't hang us for this. These people (the Baathists) will."

to survive through Nuri's authoritarian era, is showing dangerous signs of collapse.

10. Aside from a handful of old politicians with tiny personal followings, only two political groups, the Baath and the Communist, now operate in Iraq -- and the latter are proscribed and repressed. There is widespread feeling that more organized political activity is desirable, but there are neither leaders nor parties to translate this feeling into action. The Communists will certainly strive to build their strength clandestinely, especially among those elements most likely to be out of phase with the Baathists, such as peasants, workers, and military personnel. The Iraqi Communists are already supporting the Kurds and will strive to achieve a dominant role in the Kurdish Democratic Party, the political arm of the present rebellion. The Soviets are giving political and propaganda support to the Kurdish rebels, probably hoping to profit from the turbulence of the rebellion, since their former favorable position in Baghdad has been largely destroyed.

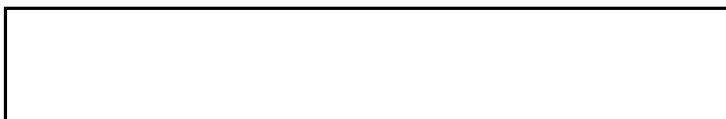
11. What does this mean for the future of Iraq? It would be incorrect to say that Iraq is reverting to the level of insecurity which prevailed in Ottoman times, but certainly present conditions are more disturbed than during the army coups of the thirties,



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indeed, since the establishment of the state in 1921. If the Baathist government does not contrive a settlement of the Kurdish insurrection, enlist the meaningful cooperation and participation in governing of at least some political elements other than itself, and take steps to eliminate or drastically reduce legal and extra-legal bloodletting, then the steady trend away from orderly government is likely to bring Iraq into a political, social, and economic quagmire. Such conditions would endanger the once promising economic development of Iraq, provide tempting opportunities to the Soviets, to other Arabs, to Iran and Turkey to meddle in various ways, and generally set back chances for the stability which is a cardinal aim of US policy toward Iraq.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

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